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THE DARK TOWER ~THE GUNSLINGER~

THE BATTLE OF TULL

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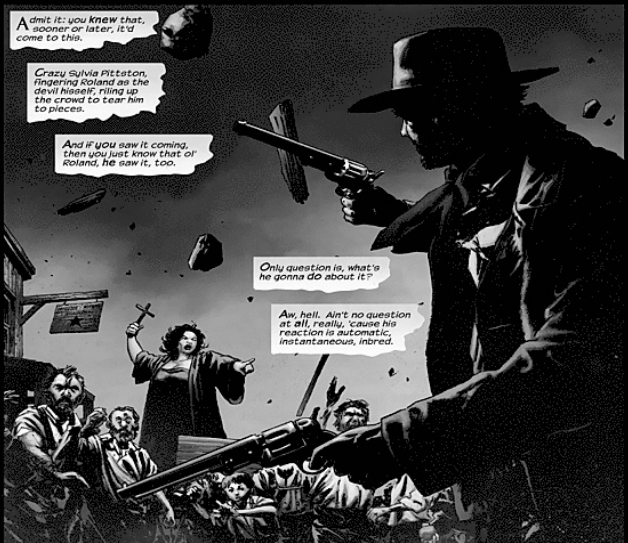
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PREVIOUSLY...

Roland Deschain, last of the line of Arthur Eld, continues his pursuit of the Man in Black across the endless Mohaine Desert. The gunslinger believes he may hold the key to Roland's all-consuming quest for the secret of the Dark Tower.

He travels through Pricetown and eventually reaches the decrepit town of Tull. Attempting to gain knowledge of the Man in Black's whereabouts, Roland sleeps with a female saloon keeper named Allie. She tells him how the Man in Black came to Tull and brought Nort, the town drunk, back to life with a bizarre ritual. Nort gave her a note from the Man in Black that said once she mouthed the word "nineteen" the secrets of death and the land beyond would be opened to her. This terrified Allie and she did all she could not to think of the number.

Roland's departure from Tull is stalled by minister Sylvia Pittson's accusation of being the Interloper. Incensed by this, he is ferociously surrounded by her congregation...



A man in a dark coat and hat aims a revolver at a crowd of people. Debris is flying through the air. In the background, a woman in a dark dress holds a cross aloft, and several men are visible, some looking on with concern.

Admit it: you *knew* that, sooner or later, it'd come to this.

Crazy Sylvia Pittston, fingering Roland as the devil himself, riling up the crowd to tear him to pieces.

And if you saw it coming, then you just know that ol' Roland, he saw it, too.

Only question is, what's he gonna do about it?

Aw, hell. Ain't no question at all, really, 'cause his reaction is automatic, instantaneous, inbred.



Roland, still in his dark coat and hat, is mounted on a dark horse. He is shouting with his mouth wide open and his right arm raised. He holds a revolver in his left hand. The crowd below is visible, with people looking up at him.

The butts of his guns are heavy and sure in his hands, even as the trap is sprung.

He shouts a warning to the men in dirty dungarees, the women in faded dresses...



...even to the children, tagging after their parents as they pelt him with wood and debris.



But they don't listen.
They never listen.



Not to his words of warning.
Not to his warning shots.



Instead they pelt him with their makeshift weapons. One of them, a board with some nails pounded raggedly through it, rips at his arm and draws blood.

A black and white comic panel showing a man in a dark coat and a wide-brimmed hat aiming a revolver. He is in the foreground, slightly to the right. In the background, a group of people are looking on with expressions of concern and fear. One woman in the center has a pained or shouting expression. The scene is filled with dust or debris, suggesting a chaotic environment.

And there's Allie, of course it had to be Allie, with the distorted, grinning face of Sheb peering over her shoulder, like a witch's familiar.

She is his shield and sacrifice.

A black and white comic panel featuring a close-up of two characters. On the left, a man with a wide-brimmed hat and a grimacing, almost monstrous expression looks towards the right. On the right, a woman with dark hair and a look of intense fear or pain screams with her mouth wide open. The background is dark and filled with floating debris.

Kill me, Roland!
Kill me!

I said the word, nineteen, I said, and he told me...

I can't bear it!

Shut up, girl! He wouldn't dare. I know his kind!

A black and white comic panel showing a close-up of a revolver barrel, pointed towards the left. The barrel has a small, stylized 'R' logo on its side. In the background, the face of a man wearing a hat is partially visible, looking intently at the target.

You've never met my kind. You know nothing.

A black and white comic panel showing a man in a dark coat and hat holding a woman. The man is in the foreground, his body angled towards the woman. He has a serious, determined expression. The woman is being held from behind, her head tilted back and her arms outstretched. The background is a bright, hazy sky with some debris floating in the air.

His hands are trained to give her what she wants.

The guns beat their heavy, atonal music into the air.



The last expression on her face might have been gratitude.

You're going to the land of Nineteen, wherever that is. Both of you.



As for Sheb's last expression?



Surprise, I think, pretty much covers it.

Nineteen?



Even as he falls, plenty more surge forward to take his place.



Get him!



Kill the interloper!

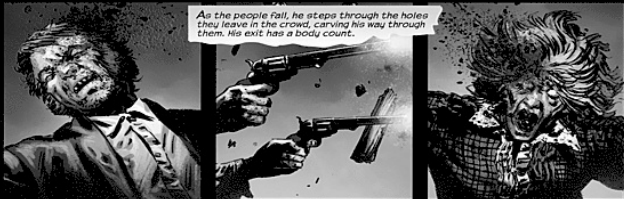
Kill him in the name of the Man Jesus!

Kill him for Sylvia!





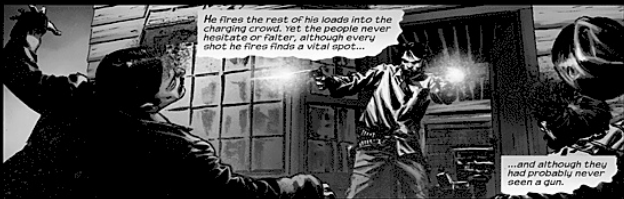
He blasts his way through them.



As the people fall, he steps through the holes they leave in the crowd, carving his way through them. His exit has a body count.



He leads them a feverish parade across the street and toward the rickety general store and barbershop that faces Sheb's. Or should I say, the late Sheb's.



He fires the rest of his loads into the charging crowd. Yet the people never hesitate or falter, although every shot he fires finds a vital spot...

...and although they had probably never seen a gun.

The gunslinger, he reloads like nobody else, with a rapidity that was trained into his fingers.



They shuttle so busily between gunbelts and cylinders you'd think they were ready to leap off his hands.

I'll tell ya right now, any less speed than that, and he'd've been dead at the hands of the crazed mob...



...their faces zealously blank, their eyes filled with bland fire.

But Roland has plenty of fire of his own.



...and in short order, they don't have much in the way of faces.



The Killer! Your souls! The cloven hoof!



There goes Sylvia again. I should have killed her when I had the chance.

Sparing her life cost all of these crazy bastards theirs.



Roland may be right.
Although frankly...

...they don't seem to
be holding their lives
all that sacred.



If they don't give
a damn, why should
Roland?



Yet he does, which is,
I guess, what makes
him a gunslinger...



...and me just a feller
what tells stories
about gunslingers,
do ya kennit?

This should
buy me the time
to reload.



Get that
damned barrel
out of the way,
y'дите!

Oooooo!!



He grabs a pan of boiling water containing two nicked straight-razors and flings it.



He's rewarded with screams of frantic incoherency and two less lunatics.



There he is!

I see him, Aunt Mill!



Except what good is seeing Roland...



...when he also sees you?

He heads toward
the desert, ten
paces, twenty.

Then the back door of
the barbershop flies
open and they boil out.



He opens fire. They
fall in squats, they
fall backwards. But
they keep coming.



They are nearly within
gripping distance as he
sees Kennerly and his
daughter.



He lets them both
have it, and the ones
behind them.



Their bodies thump
like scarecrows.





The crowd halts for a moment, startled...

...the mob faces shivering into individual, bewildered faces.

Roland dares to whisper to himself, "Is it over?"



But then a man starts screaming and begins running in a circle.



A woman with blisters on her hands cackles feverishly.



One gun is all he has time to reload, and then...

Devil! Devil! Devil!

Childkiller! Monster!

Destroy him, brothers and sisters!



Destroy the child-killing interloper!



This is the moment!



It surely is.



The air explodes with shots as he shatters her articles of faith.



She's an unarmed woman standing before him. Might seem brutal to just gun her down.



*But Roland is that most dangerous of men: one who is **NOT** out of ammo... but fresh out of mercy.*

Four more shots, all to the head, even as she gasps out curses with her dying breath.

They say the pen's mightier than the sword, but apparently the spoken word don't do much against a six-shooter.









*Silence comes
back in, filling
jagged spaces.*

*The gunslinger's bleeding
from maybe twenty
different wounds...*



*...all of them shallow
except for the cut
across his calf.*



*Each of the townspeople
ain't got but one wound.
In battles to the death,
however, as in all things...*



*...quality beats
out quantity
every time.*



*But if you're the type for who
quantity is important, then
you'd probably want to know:*

*The population of the town
had numbered thirty-nine
men, fourteen women and
five children.*



That's how many corpses there were. Roland had apparently shot and killed everyone in Tull.

Of course, he has to check this out for himself. Partly to make sure no one might still be planning to attack...

...and partly, I reckon, out of sheer morbid curiosity.

He follows the trail of death, counting as he goes.

He ends up where he had started, in the middle of the deserted main street. All bodies accounted for.

All but one who hadn't been rightly alive earlier, and so wasn't exactly part of the population.

A sickish-sweet odor comes to him on the first of the dry, stirring wind. He follows it, looks up and nods.



All accounted
for.



When he cuts Nort loose, the
body seems lighter than a
bag of sticks as it falls.



Join the
common people,
Nort. Those who
only have to
die once.



As the light falls and the
sand begins to fly, he
returns to Allie's...

...there to eat hamburgers,
drink beers, and spend the
night sleeping in the bed
where he and Allie had lain.



Allie--



Good-bye,
Allie.

I hope that
you're somewhere
that you can hear
me say that.

And that,
wherever
you are...



...that
Nineteen can't
touch you.

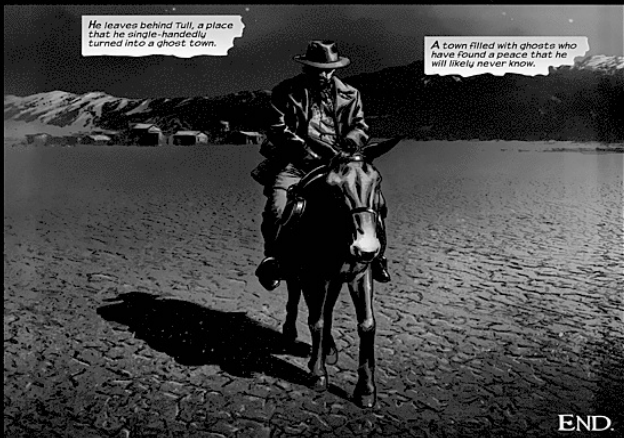


The next morning the wind is gone and the sun is its usual bright and forgetful self.

The bodies have gone south like tumbleweeds with the wind.



At midmorning, having bound all his cuts, he moves on as well.



He leaves behind Tull, a place that he single-handedly turned into a ghost town.

A town filled with ghosts who have found a peace that he will likely never know.

END.

AN EYE AND A HAND

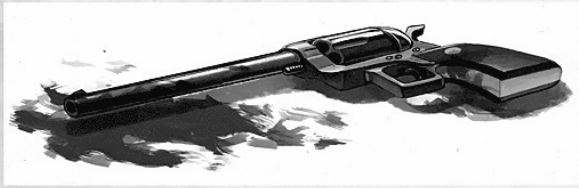
Back in 2003, while I was editing the first volume of my *Dark Tower Concordance*, Stephen King told me that he was rewriting *The Gunslinger*. As a fan of the original version of the tale, I was surprised. Was Steve certain that he wanted to revisit the initial part of Roland's journey? After all, he'd only just completed the final section of Roland's saga. Besides, I loved the first version of *The Gunslinger* and I couldn't imagine what Steve could possibly want to change.

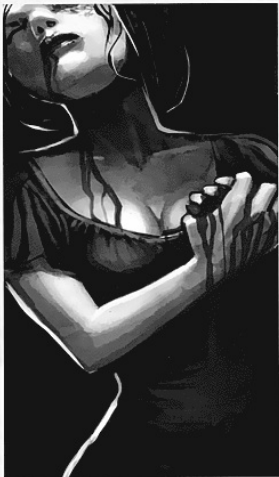
Needless to say, when I received the new *Gunslinger* manuscript, I was intrigued. Steve had already told me that he had rewritten the *Gunslinger* so that it would be thematically tied to the later novels. In the new version of the tale, Roland would encounter the magical number nineteen, and his sense of déjà vu—his inkling that he had experienced the horrors of Tull already—would become more prominent. However, what I didn't realize

until I read the final manuscript was that Roland's character would subtly change. He would still be pragmatic and at times brutal, but unlike the Roland I had known before, this Roland could at least hope to find redemption.

Those of you who read last month's installment of our tale have already witnessed one of Roland's acts of brutal necessity. While visiting Sylvia Pittston in her desert shack, Roland discovered that the mad preacher-woman had lain with the Man in Black and had conceived a child. However, the child she carried did not belong to the Dark Man at all but to his demonic master—the evil Crimson King. In order to remove the devil gestating in Pittston's womb, Roland forced his gun into the most private part of the preacher-woman's body. The magical guns of Deschain destroyed the Crimson King's offspring but this destruction came at a cost. Although many could argue that what Roland did was necessary—after all, no one in Mid-World would want the demonic Red King to spawn a child—others would say that Roland's methods were unbelievably brutal. Although Michael Lark worked hard to keep his pencils within a PG rating, readers can tell that Roland's attack upon Pittston's unborn child is uncomfortably close to sexual assault.

In this month's installment of our tale, Roland's actions are little more justifiable. When Pittston's throngs assault him, our gunslinger has to fight for his life and so shoots to kill, regardless of whether those who attack





him are men, women, or children. As Stephen King writes in both versions of *The Gunslinger*:

"... Men, women, and children charged him. . . He shot his guns empty and they fell like ninepins. . . The guns were . . . transmogrified into an Eye and a Hand, and he stood, screaming and reloading, his mind far away and absent, letting his hands do their reloading trick. Could he . . . tell them he had spent a thousand years learning this trick . . . tell them of the guns and the blood that had blessed them? Not with his mouth. But his hands could speak their own tale."

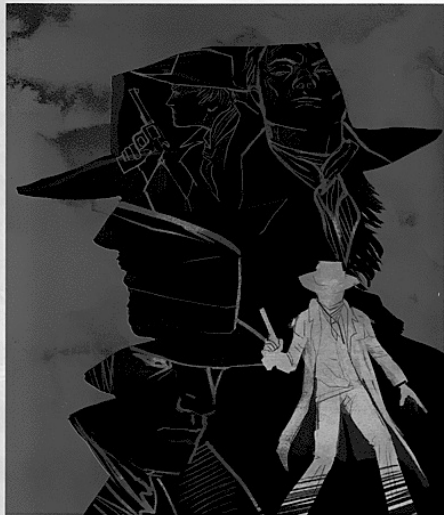
Although Roland's actions are not admirable, they are understandable.

Since he fights to save his skin, the age of his assailants is irrelevant. Life has taught our gunslinger that sparing his enemies can be deadly. His reactions are "automatic, instantaneous, inbred." Even if Roland the man has a conscience, his hands and his guns do not.

More troubling, however, is Roland's killing of his lover Allie. She has been taken hostage by Sheb—the piano player at the tonk—who uses her as a human shield. But our horror at Roland's killing of Allie is assuaged by Allie herself. As Stephen King describes in the rewritten version of *The Gunslinger*, Allie begs Roland to kill her:

"He whirled on his heels while his hands pulled the guns from their holsters, the butts heavy and sure in his hands. It was Allie, and of course it had to be Allie, coming at him with her





why he does what he does. As we feared might happen, Allie finally fell into the trap laid for her by the Man in Black. She spoke the magic word *nineteen* to the resurrected weed eater Nort, and learned the horrible secrets of the afterlife. She could not bear to live with this new knowledge, so begged Roland to end her life. Roland kills the woman who had become his lover, but this seemingly unforgivable act becomes palatable once we hear Allie's pleas. For once Roland's guns do not kill in cold blood—instead they give the peace of the clearing.

However, in the original version of *The*

face distorted, the scar a hellish purple in the lowering light. He saw that she was held hostage; the distorted, grimacing face of Sheb peered over her shoulder . . . She was his shield and sacrifice. . .

'Kill me, Roland, kill me! I said the word, *nineteen*, I said, and he told me ... I can't bear it.'

The hands were trained to give her what she wanted. . . . she sagged . . . The last expression on her face might have been gratitude."

In this version of the tale, Roland takes part in what is, in some ways, an assisted suicide. We are shocked by Roland's actions, but we understand

Gunslinger, Roland's act is much less forgivable. Allie doesn't beg Roland to kill her, she begs Roland NOT to kill her. But despite Allie's desperate entreaties, our gunslinger can't help but mow her down with all of the others. He is an eye and a hand—a man bred to the gun, and his hands shoot before his mind has time to think:

"He whirled on his heels while his hands pulled the guns from their holsters, the hafts heavy and sure in his hands. It was Allie, and of course it had to be Allie, coming at him with her face distorted, the scar a hellish purple in the lowering light. He saw that she was

held hostage; the distorted, grimacing face of Sheb peered over her shoulder . . . She was his shield and sacrifice. . .

'He's got me O Jesus don't shoot don't don't don't -'

But the hands were trained . . . Her mouth flapped and she sagged and . . . fell into the dust."

For those of us who have known Roland since his boyhood adventures in Hambry (recounted in both the novel *Wizard and Glass* and the graphic novel *The Gunslinger Born*), Roland seems to have changed completely. The adolescent who was willing to sacrifice his life for the cause of the White is now a cruel and ruthless adult. Time has changed him, and we can't help but wonder if he has become as pitiless and savage as the enemies he opposes. In *The Little Sisters of Eluria*, Roland was willing to fire warning shots before aiming to kill. Even when confronted by the mutant Green Folk, Roland hesitated before shooting a bullet into his enemy's heart. However, as Roland learned too well during that particular adventure, leniency is not always wise. Those same Green Folk beat our hero into unconsciousness and then tied his body to a horse and dragged him. They only spared his life because their masters, the vampiric Little Sisters of Eluria, wanted to feed on Roland's blood.

In the final books of the Dark Tower saga, an older, more experienced Roland regrets the violent, vengeful acts of his youth. He longs to regain his humanity and his ability to love. If Roland's journey is in part a parable about personal redemption, then the Roland you have met in this comic book is a small step closer to salvation than he was in the previous version of this tale. Although Roland's actions in this rewrite of the novel do not actually change—he still shoots his lover Allie, just as he forces Sylvia Pittston to take his gun into her body—at least Allie's death can be seen as a mercy killing. Stephen King does not change Roland's conduct, but he alters the circumstances surrounding Roland's actions and by so doing, reduces the number

and gravity of the sins committed by his protagonist. The Roland we met in the original version of *The Gunslinger* seemed beyond moral redemption. However, the Roland we see in the rewritten version of the tale holds a glimmer of hope. Even if time has made him cruel and heartless in many other ways, we can at least believe he cared for his lover Allie. We can also believe that—under other circumstances—he may not have killed her at all. And this, in its own way, is an act of atonement.

Until next month, long days and pleasant nights!

Robin Furth



ART EVOLUTION.
PENCILS BY MICHAEL LARK

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ART EVOLUTION
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DARK TOWER: TULL - ISSUE 5

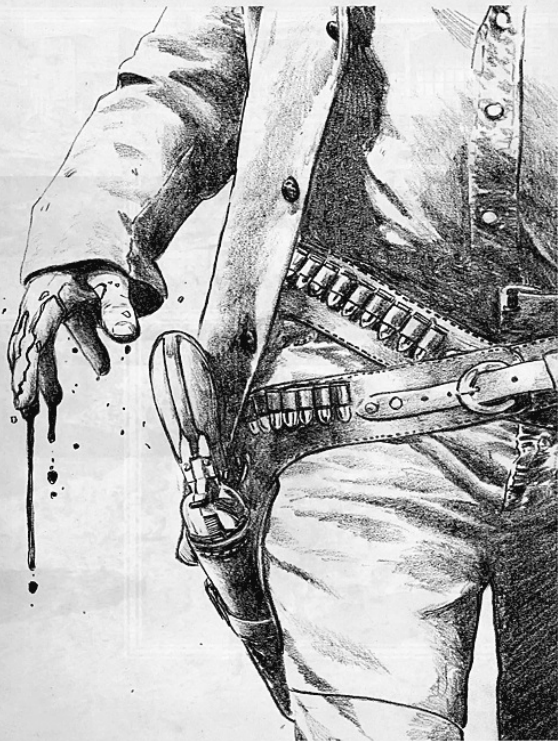
J.L.



INKS BY STEFANO GAUDIANO



COVER PENCILS FOR TULL #5 BY MICHAEL LARK



NEXT: THE WAY STATION





All is not well in Mid-World. Gunslinger Roland Deschain has seen his father's Affiliation fall to the Good Man's forces. With his ka-tet murdered and Gilead in ruins, Roland has accepted his destiny to seek and save the Dark Tower and set right this out-of-synch world. For now, Roland's search has him crossing the desert, pursuing the Man in Black, who holds the key to finding the Dark Tower. However, the Man in Black has left traps in his wake for the gunslinger, and upon entering the sleepy town of Tull, Roland fears he may have just stepped into one.

From the creative team that brought Roland's early adventures to life comes a new phase in the saga of the last gunslinger. This is a dark chronicle of revenge, lust, betrayal, and destiny—a cosmic quest that could only be conceived by master storyteller Stephen King.

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FOR STRONG LANGUAGE & SEXUAL CONTENT

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